



THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

By VAUGHAN KESTER
Illustrations by D. McVILL



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SYNOPSIS.

The scene at the opening of the story is laid in the library of a great southern plantation, known as the Barrow. The scene is to be set, and the characters are introduced. The story is a comedy of manners, and the characters are introduced. The story is a comedy of manners, and the characters are introduced.

"We know no more than we did this morning," said Mahaffy. "You are mixing up all sorts of side issues with what should be your real purpose."

"Not at all, Solomon—not at all! I look upon my grandson's speedy recovery as an assured fact. Fentress dare not hold him. He knows he is run to earth at last."

"Price—"

"No, Solomon—no, my friend, we will not speak of it again. You will go back to Belle Plain with Yancy and Cavendish; you must represent me there. We have as good as found Hannibal, but we must be active in Miss Malroy's behalf. For us that has an important bearing on the future, and since I cannot, you must be at Belle Plain when Carrington arrives with his pack of dogs. Give him the advantage of your sound and mature judgment, Solomon; don't let any false modesty keep you in the background."

"Who's going to second you?" snapped Mahaffy.

The judge was a picture of indifference.

"It will be quite informal, the code is scarcely applicable; I merely intend to remove him because he is not fit to live."

"At sun-up!" muttered Mahaffy.

"I intend to start one day right even if I never live to begin another," said the judge, a sudden fierce light flashing from his eyes. "I feel that this is the turning point in my career, Solomon! I went on. The beginning of great things! But I shall take no chances with the future; I shall prepare for every possible contingency. I am going to make you and Yancy my grandson's guardians. There's a hundred thousand acres of land hereabout that must come to him. I shall outline in writing the legal steps to be taken to substantiate his claims. Also he will inherit largely from me at my death."

Something very like laughter escaped from Mahaffy's lips.

"There you go, Solomon, with your inopportune mirth! What in God's name have I if I haven't hope? Take

don't live to enjoy what's mine, boy I'll warm the cockles of your heart with imported brandy. I carry twenty years' hunger and thirst under my we-coal, and I'll feed and drink like a gentleman yet!" The judge smirked his lips in an ecstasy of enjoyment, and dropping down before the table which served him as a desk, seized a pen.

"It's good enough to think about," Price admitted Mahaffy grudgingly.

"It's better to do; and if anything happens to me the papers I am going to leave will tell you how it's to be done. Man, there's a million of money in sight, and we've got to get it and spend it and enjoy it! None of your swinish thrift for me, but life on a big scale—company, and feasting, and refined surroundings!"

"And you are going to meet Fentress in the morning?" asked Mahaffy.

"I suppose there's no way of avoiding that."

"Avoiding it?" almost shouted the judge. "For what have I been living? I shall meet him, let the consequences be what they may. Tonight when I have reduced certain facts to writing I shall join you at Belle Plain. The strange and melancholy history of my life I shall place in your hands for safe keeping. In the morning I can be driven back to Boggs."

"And you will go there without a second?"

"If necessary, yes."

"I declare, Price, you are hardly fitted to be at large! Why, you act as if you were tired of life! There's Yancy—there's Cavendish!"

The judge gave him an inquiring but superior smile.

"Two very worthy men, but I go to Boggs attended by a gentleman or I go there alone. I am aware of your prejudices, Solomon; otherwise I might ask this favor of you."

Mr. Mahaffy snorted loudly and turned to the door, for Yancy and Cavendish were now approaching the house, the latter with a mess sack slung over his shoulder.

"Here, Solomon, take one of my pistols," urged the judge hastily. Tom's stammering speech, he was

If the dogs were to be used with any hope of success he had no time to spare, and this was the merest suspicion, illogical conjecture, based on nothing beyond his distrust of Ware. In the end he sprang from the saddle, and leading his horse into the woods, tied it to a sapling.

A hurried investigation told him that five men had ridden in and out of that path. Of the five, all coming from the south, four had turned south again, but the fifth man—Ware in other words—had gone north. He weighed the possible significance of these facts.

"I am only wasting time!" he confessed reluctantly, and was on the point of turning away, when, on the very edge of the road and just where the dust yielded to the hard clay of the path, his glance lighted on the print of a small and daintily shod foot. The throbbing of his heart quickened curiously.

"Betty!" The word leaped from his lips.

That small foot had left but the one impression. There were other signs, however, that claimed his attention; namely, the boot-prints of Solomon and his men; and he made the inevitable discovery that these tracks were all confined to the one spot. They began suddenly and as suddenly ceased, yet there was no mystery about them; he had the marks of the wheels to help him to a sure conclusion. A carriage had turned just here, several men had alighted; they had with them a child, or a woman. Either they had re-entered the carriage and driven back as they had come, or they had gone toward the river. He felt the soul within him turn sick.

He stole along the path; the terror of the river was ever in his thoughts, and the specter of his fear seemed to flit before him and lure him on. Presently he caught his first glimpse of the bayou and his legs shook under him; but the path wound deeper still into what appeared to be an untouched solitude, wound on between the crowding tree forms, a little back from the shore, with an intervening tangle of vines and bushes. He scanned this closely as he hurried forward, scarcely conscious that he was searching for some trampled space at the water's edge; but the verdant wall preserved its unbroken continuity, and twenty minutes later he came within sight of Hicks' clearing and the keel boat, where it rested against the bank.

A little farther on he found the spot where Solomon had launched the skiff the night before. The keel of his boat had cut deep into the slippery clay; more than this, the impression of the small shoe was repeated here, and just beside it was the print of a child's bare foot.

He no longer doubted that Betty and Hannibal had been taken across the bayou to the cabin, and he ran back up the path the distance of a mile and plunged into the woods on his right, his purpose being to pass around the head of the expanse of sluggish water to a point from which he could later approach the cabin.

But the cabin proved to be better defended than he had foreseen; and as he advanced, the difficulties of the task he had set himself became almost insurmountable; yet sustained as he was by his imperative need, he tore his way through the labyrinth of trailing vines, or floundered across acre-wide patches of green slime and black mud, which at each step threatened to engulf him in their treacherous depths, until at the end of an hour he gained the southern side of the clearing and a firmer footing within the shelter of the woods.

Here he paused and took stock of his surroundings. The two or three buildings Mr. Hicks had erected stood midway of the clearing and were very modest improvements adapted to their owner's somewhat flippant pursuit of agriculture. While Carrington was still staring about him, the cabin door swung open and a woman stepped forth. It was the girl Bess. She went to a corner of the building and called loudly:

"Joe! Oh, Joe!"

Carrington glanced in the direction of the keel boat and an instant later saw Solomon clamber over its side. The tavern-keeper crested to the cabin, where he was met by Bess, who placed in his hands what seemed to be a wooden bowl. With this he slouched off to one of the outbuildings, which he entered. Ten or fifteen minutes slipped by, then he came from the shed and after securing the door, returned to the cabin. He was again met by Bess, who relieved him of the bowl; they exchanged a few words and Solomon walked away and afterward disappeared over the side of the keel boat.

This much was clear to the Kentuckian: food had been taken to some one in the shed—to Betty and the boy!—more likely to George.

The doctor gazed a while at me and gravely shook his head; "You must not work so hard," said he; "eat only whole wheat bread; Avoid all starchy things and try to take your breakfast rare; Avoid the deadly stuff they fry, keep in the open air; And cheer up. Clear your frowns away, put all your cares aside; Play golf or tennis every day, or get a horse to ride."

"You might take three months off and go to Europe or Japan, Or take a trip to Mexico; you need a change, old man; You have a haggard, weary look, your system's all run down; Go out and roll beside some brook a thousand miles from town; Take my advice and rest a while, become a man of ease, Quit working and learn how to smile. Three dollars, if you please."

He could not know how glad I was to get his dear advice, Nor that I could not go because I was chained to lack the price; He knew not that if for a space I traveled unconcerned They would inform me that my place was filled, when I returned; By toiling hard and steadily I clung to my position And kept those who were dear to me in fairly good condition.

Twice.

"Yes," said the retired army officer, "I can recall two occasions when I was most terribly frightened."

"Oh," exclaimed the romantic young lady, "do tell me about them. I suppose it happened when you were fighting the Indians."

"No," he replied; "one time was when I was married, and the other time was when we had our baby christened."

Brave Consideration.

"I suppose," the young matron said, addressing the spinster who was getting along in years, "you never married because it has been impossible for you to find a man whom you considered good enough."

"Oh, no. I have found plenty of men who were good enough, but I have always felt that it was a shame to spoil a good thing."

Perhaps.

I know a maid that seems to set The fellows all half crazy, yet I can't make out the reason. Although in friendliness we dwell, And long have wished each other well, Both in and out of season.

Still, I will own that it might be Somewhat more difficult for me To carelessly resist 'er. If I had just encountered her And she—this little maiden—were Some other fellow's sister.

Not Worrying.

"Why in the world did you ever rent a flat on the nineteenth floor? What chance would there be to escape in case of fire?"

"There wouldn't be much of a chance, that's a fact, but I'm away from home most of the time, and I've had the furniture well insured without letting my wife know about it."

Sympathy.

The fault was mine, 'tis true; I asked my friend for sympathy; He heard my story through. And said he sympathized with me.

His sympathy he gave, As I have mentioned heretofore; 'Twas all I dared to crave, But I expected something more.

Her Day.

"I believe she was considered a great beauty in her day."

"Yes, so I have heard. What a poor old day it must have been."

Unthinkable.

Have you ever heard of a matinee hero who snored?

VOICED ALL THEIR THOUGHTS

Office Boy the Only One of the Crowd of "Mourners" Who Was Truthful in His Speech.

The treasurer of the bank was dead. Word had just been received over the telephone. It was shortly after business hours, and as if by common consent, all of the employees gathered together in a little group.

"I feel as though I had lost a brother," said the assistant treasurer.

"I shall never get over it," added the cashier.

"It makes me sick," whispered the paying teller.

"It is very, very terrible," murmured the receiving teller.

"I shall think about it all night," remarked the bookkeeper.

"It's awful—awful!" said the clerks.

There was a moment's silence, then the errand boy spoke.

"I wonder who'll get the job?" he chirped.

Everybody gave an involuntary start. The errand boy had been a mind reader—Puck.

AMERICAN IDEA.

The American—What's your father's business?

The Englishman—My father has a business.

The American—Then what's his craft?

Not Informed.

"What do you think of the war?"

"What war?"

"The war in Tripoli."

"I really can't say. I haven't seen any of the films."

LADIES CAN WEAR SHOES

One shoe smaller after using Allen's Foot-Powder, the Antirheumatic powder to be shaken into the shoes. It makes tight or new shoes feel easy. Gives rest and comfort. Refuse substitutes. For FREE trial package, address Allen B. Colman, Le Roy, N. Y. Adv.

Crusty.

"Your hair is falling out," said the barber.

"Yes," replied the crusty customer. "You see my skull is so hard that it can't fall in."

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Ever notice how eager one doctor is not to boast in the vicinity of another?

Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup for Children teething, softens the gums, reduces inflammation, allays pain, cures wind colic, etc. A bottle 10c.

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If you would strike a man favorably never hit him in the vicinity of his pocketbook.

CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

"You swear you'll do your part?" he said thickly. He took his purse from his pocket and counted out the amount due Hicks. He named the total, and paused irresolutely.

"Don't you want the fire lighted?" asked Hicks. He was familiar with his employer's vacillating moods.

"Yes," answered Ware, his lips quivering; and slowly, with shaking fingers, he added to the pile of bills in Hicks' hand.

"Well, take care of yourself," said Hicks, when the count was complete. He thrust the roll of bills into his pocket and moved to the door.

Alone again, the planter collapsed into his chair, breathing heavily, but his terror swept over him and left him with a savage sense of triumph. This passed; he sprang up, intending to recall Hicks and unmake his bargain. What had he been thinking of—safety lay only in flight! Before he reached the door his greed was in the ascendant. He dropped down on the edge of his bed, his eyes fixed on the window. The sun sank lower. From where he sat he saw it through the upper half of the shut, blood-red and livid in a mist of fleecy clouds.

It was in the tops of the old oaks now, which sent their shadows into his room. Again maddened by his terror, he started and backed toward the door; but again his greed, the one dominating influence of his life, vanquished him.

He watched the sun sink. He watched the red splendor fade over the river; he saw the first stars appear. He told himself that Hicks would soon be gone—if the fire was not to be lighted he must act at once! He stole to the window. It was dusk now, yet he could distinguish the distant wooded boundaries of the great fields framed by the darkening sky. Then in the silence he heard the thud of hoofs.



"It Will Be Quite Informal, the Code Is Scarcely Applicable."

grandson shall! He shall wear velvet and a lace collar and ride his pony yet, by God, as a gentleman's grandson should!"

"It sounds well, Price, but where's the money coming from to push a lawsuit?"

The judge waved this aside.

"The means will be found, Solomon. Our horizon is lifting—I can see it lift! Don't drag me back from the portal of hope! We'll drink the stuff that comes across the water; that from me and what would I be? Why, the very fate I have been fighting off with tooth and nail would overwhelm me. I'd sink into unimportance—my unparalleled misfortunes would degrade me to a level with the commonest! No, sir, I've never been without hope, and though I've fallen I've always got up. What Fentress has is based on money he stole from me. By God, the days of his profit-taking are at an end! I am going to strip him. And even if I

still seeing his ghastly face, and he had come upon him with startling suddenness. He had chanced to look back over his shoulder and when he faced about there had been the planter within a hundred yards of him.

Presently Carrington's glance ceased to follow the windings of the path. He stared down at the grey dust and saw the trail left by Hues and his "You may need it at Belle Plain. Good by, and God bless you!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

Bess Leads to Betty.

Just where he had parted from Ware, Carrington set his horse, his brows knit and his eyes turned in the direction of the path. He was on his way to a plantation below Blizard, the owner of which had recently imported a pack of bloodhounds; but this unexpected encounter with Ware had affected him strangely. He still heard party. For a moment he hesitated;

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PISO'S REMEDY

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FOR COUGHS AND COLDS

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Judge Names His Second.

"Price—" began Mahaffy. They were back in Raleigh in the room the judge called his office, and this was Mahaffy's first opportunity to ease his mind on the subject of the duel, as they had only just parted from Yancy and Cavendish, who had stopped at one of the stores to make certain purchases for the raft.

"Not a word, Solomon—it had to come. I am going to kill him. I shall feel better then."

"What if he kills you?" demanded Mahaffy harshly. The judge shrugged his shoulders.

"That is as it may be."

"Have you forgotten your grandson?" Mahaffy's voice was still harsh and rasping.

"I regard my meeting with Fentress as nothing less than a sacred duty to him."

CHAPTER XXVII.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

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CHAPTER XXX.

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